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Bruijkleen Colonie

(BOROUGH OF BROOKLYN)

1638-1918

BY

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INTRODUCTION.

Many a good Brooklynite, striving to gain a clearer conception of the early times of our borough, has found himself confronted by a dazzling variety of names, applied to the village, town and later city of Brooklyn. He finally became convinced that these names were variations of the early town name. This, however, is not so; three names are most often used, namely, Bruijkleen, Breukelen and Brookland; there are many others, which differ in minor respects, but can be easily noticed as variations of either one of these three principal names.

The first name, Bruijkleen, was on at least two occasions the only bright star that shone on the inky sky of the Dutch Colony of New Netherland. It was the only hope that kept the West India Company from giving up the colony in utter despair. First in 1638, when the colony, held in the grip of a few men, all directors of the company, had reached a milestone in its history, where colonists could no longer be lured to the far distant, wild country, to work for the landowners, giving up the comforts of civilization; and again in 1645, after the Indian War of the past three years had destroyed the fruits of the labor of many years. At that time, the Bruijkleen Colonie, started a few years prior under truly democratic auspices, saved the colony of New Netherland from being abandoned by the West India Company.

The second name, Breukelen, was the name of a peaceful Dutch hamlet within the Bruijkleen Colonie, and its peacefulness prevented it from doing anything that would have been out of the ordinary.

The third name, Brookland, was the English version of Bruijkleen. The Dutch pronounced the word Brook-lane; the English confused this with Gebroken Land, the Dutch equivalent of the Indian name of a part of Long Island. The English applied the name Brookland to the ferry and sometimes to the town, after

they had relieved the Dutch of the trouble of governing New Netherland. The Dutch had used the name Gebroken Land for the entire island and it is found inscribed upon old maps at the place where the town of Brooklyn is located, which part was the most interesting to the Dutch.

THE WEST INDIA COMPANY.

Now, to get a clear view of all matters connected with our case, we will have to briefly review the happenings in all parts of the world at that particular time. In 1579 five of the northern Netherland provinces threw off the yoke of Spain and the other two provinces followed suit soon thereafter. This led to the formation of de Vereende Provintien der Nederlanden, *i. e.*, the United Provinces of the Netherlands, and William of Orange, called the Silent, was elected Stadholder. Amsterdam was then the greatest commercial city of the world. Some of her municipal officers were appointed by the Stadholder and others were elected by the merchants of the city. The latter were a group of men belonging to families which had acquired control of the trade of the world. These men elected the officers of the city out of their own number. The municipal officers elected delegates to the Provincial States, and the Provincial States again elected representatives to the States General (*de Staten Generael der Vereenichden Nederlanden*). Thus the merchants of Amsterdam had actual control of the Netherlands and the Burgomasters and Schepen of the city were the leaders among them. The trade with India, however, was controlled by the merchants of Lisbon in Portugal, and the Amsterdam merchants sent their ships to Lisbon and from there carried the goods of India to all parts of the world. King Phillip II of Spain conquered Portugal in 1580 and joined it to Spain, and the Dutch merchants could no longer expect to get any goods from India by way of Lisbon. Therefore the East India Company was formed in 1602 to trade with the East Indies direct. Hendrick Hudson was sent out by this company to search for a northern route to the Orient, over which the Dutch ships would not be exposed to the dangers of attack by ships of his Spanish majesty. Hudson did not succeed

in this, although he thought he was reaching his goal when he discovered in 1609 a river which he named North River, believing this to be the looked for northern route to India. As early as 1590 it had been proposed to form a West India Company for the trade with America and Africa, but on account of the danger of capture by Spanish ships, no voyages were undertaken until 1597. The directors of the East India Company were for the greatest part members of the group of Amsterdam merchants, and in 1614 a new concern was formed, consisting of members of the same group; this was the United New Netherland Company, with a charter for four years, to trade with the Indians on the North River. The agent of this company, Jacob Eelkins, made in 1617 a treaty with the Mohawk chiefs, by which the Dutch, *i. e.*, the Amsterdam merchants, received permission to trade and erect trading posts within the territory known as Eastland or Wapanaki, inhabited by two tribes, which were tributaries of the Mohawk. Manhattan Island was given to these merchants for a depot, from which the peltry, gathered throughout the country, was to be sent to the Netherlands.

In 1609 a twelve years' truce had been concluded with Spain; during these years it was impossible to form a West India Company, as its formation would have brought on renewed hostilities. At the expiration of the truce in 1621 de West Indische Compagnie was incorporated, receiving a charter for twenty-four years. The company consisted of five branches, or chambers, the one at Amsterdam having the control of the colony of New Netherland. Burgomasters and former Burgomasters of Amsterdam were among the directors of the company. A board of nineteen governed the company, eighteen of which were elected by the five branches, and one was appointed by the Stadholder. The West India Company issued in 1629 a charter of Privileges and Exemptions. By this charter it was possible for men which wanted to undertake the colonization of the new country to get grants for immense tracts of land, and several of the directors of the company, members of the group of Amsterdam merchants, availed themselves of this opportunity to secure title to the choicest parts of the land. During the years 1630-31 the Manors



of Rensselaerwijck, Swanendael and Pavonia were granted. The last named grant embraced the land west and south of the island of the Mannhattans. The use of the island itself, claimed by the Amsterdam merchants on the strength of the treaty made by Jacob Felkins and the Mohawks, was given to the West India Company as the central point, from which the colony was to be governed and supplied. The hamlet, which sprung up around the fort on its southern extremity, was to be subject to the West India Company until it would have grown to the size of a town; then it was to be given a municipal government.

BRUIJKLEEN COLONIE.

The patroons or landowners found it impossible to induce a sufficient number of men to ship to the new country as colonists for these manors, and thus the feudal system of landownership was a complete failure. The West India Company issued in 1638 a new set of regulations; the land was now to be given to anybody who would undertake its cultivation, and he was to be the owner of the parcel of land, which was to be of moderate size. A new Director-General, William Kieft, arrived at the same time, and as all other land near Manhattan Island was granted to the patroons, Kieft proceeded at once to secure land on Long Island, across the East River, for a new colony, to be established according to the new rules. There were then a few settlers at the Wallabout Basin, at Gowanus, Flatlands, etc., which had bought their land of the Indians, but otherwise the Indians were still in full possession. Kieft purchased in 1638 from the Canarsee land for the projected colony, which later constituted the town of Bushwick. Two years later he acquired of them the territory of the towns of Flatlands, Flatbush and Gravesend, also part of the town of Brooklyn. In the same year he secured the balance of the town of Brooklyn from the Maereckkaakwick band, and in 1645 the town of New Utrecht from the same Indians. In 1643 he granted the territory of the town of Gravesend to a company of Englishmen, because he believed that they would be able to build up a great seaport there, but the water being too shallow his expectations never materialized and this

town, having been granted to the Englishmen, was not included within the new-rule colony. A good start was made upon the land between the Wallabout and Gowanus Bays; this being the most attractive tract for planters, because the Maereckkaakwick Indians had dwelt here upon a limited tract for generations and had made their maize fields here. Furthermore, it was within sight of the fort on Manhattan Island. Kieft erected in 1642 the Stadtherberg on the Manhattan shore, and the old church was close by. The herberg provided shelter for the planters which were working the land on the Long Island side of the river. A row-boat ferry was established at the same time, by which the men were brought over to Long Island in the morning and back to the herberg at nightfall. In later years, when New Amsterdam received a municipal government, the West India Company gave the building to the community to be used as a City Hall.

In 1644, and again in the following year, Kieft issued orders to the planters to concentrate themselves in compact settlements, because the danger of being attacked by the Indians, who were then on the warpath, was imminent. This led to the establishment of villages in the several towns; they were located along the Indian trails, which had become wagon roads. In 1652 the extravagant patents for lands, which had been granted by Director-General Van Twiller, were annulled, and the land was now available for colonists of the new era. The tract of land lying along the East River between the Wallabout and Gowanus Bays was the first to be opened for plantations of a moderate size. Instead of paying farm rent to the patroons, a planter received land as "a free loan," *i. e.*, they became the owners of the land, subject to a quit-rent consisting of the tenth of the produce of their farms, payable annually to the West India Company, after they had their plantations under cultivation for ten years. While the patroons had procured as many planters for their lands as they possibly could, still the greatest part of their immense tracts lay waste and would have remained in that state for a long time to come. Now, by granting smaller parcels to the settlers, the company had reason to expect better results, for each farmer was bound to cultivate his land or else forfeit it.

The name Bruijkleen Colonie was given to this tract of land. The name was not "coined" for a particular settlement or village like Bushwick and Flatbush in later times; it was never given to the village, but it described plainly and correctly what this tract of land was intended to be. The word "bruijkleen" is still being used in the Netherlands; translated into English it is "a free loan" The word consists of two parts, viz.: bruijk and leen; bruijken means to use, and leen denotes loan or manor. The land was given to a bruijker, *i. e.*, user or tenant, for a certain consideration. Its equivalent, in modern times, is "homestead" as used when Indian lands are opened to farmers, who thus can secure a piece of land, which becomes their property, provided they put it under cultivation. It was expected that these farms of a reasonable size would grow and prosper, whereas formerly the large manors had retarded the growth of the colony of New Netherland. Director-General Kieft, in spite of all his faults, must be credited with having introduced democracy into the country and having given to the colony a new lease of life. Stuyvesant created in 1654 a superior District Court for the Bruijkleen colonie; it consisted of the Schout and Delegates of the three towns Brëukelen, Amersfoort and Midwout; he also had a church edifice erected at the same time in Midwout or Flatbush village. In 1661 the towns of Bushwick and New Utrecht were annexed to the jurisdiction of the Schout. The English applied the name of "The Five Dutch Towns" to the former Bruijkleen Colonie.

THE BRUIJKLEEN SEAL.

The burghers of New Amsterdam petitioned in 1653 the Amsterdam Branch of the West India Company for a seal for their community, which now had reached the dignity of a city. The request being granted, a seal was in 1654 sent across the sea and delivered by the Director-General to the city authorities. New Amsterdam was now gradually slipping away from the control of the West India Company and naturally the directors became more interested in the Long Island Colony, and a seal for the Bruijkleen Colonie was created. In response to a letter

of the Schout and Secretary of the Courts of the Dutch towns upon Long Island, Director-General Stuyvesant decreed on February 14, 1664, "to take care that no deed or mortgage of any piece of land, house or lot be passed, of which no proper patent can be produced, so that our good inhabitants may not be cheated or misled, for deeds or mortgages of property, for which no patent has been issued, are null and void. In passing deeds, mortgages, etc., you will use the seal sent herewith until further orders." This, in all probability, was the seal which later became known as the seal of the City of Brooklyn, but originally was used for the Bruijkleen Colonie. This seal was very carefully gotten up to illustrate plainly for what the word Bruijkleen was intended to stand.

The originator of the seal was evidently well acquainted with mythology and ancient history, for both were utilized in getting up a suitable seal. Mythology furnished the goddess known as Hestia to the Greeks and as Vesta to the Romans. Both nations ascribed to the goddess special qualities which were combined in the seal. History furnished the "fasces," which played an important part in the history of the Romans. The fasces were used in the seal to typify the standing of the planters in the colony; instead of being bondsmen or tenants of the patroons, they were endowed with sovereign power, as far as their lands were concerned. The figure in the seal seems to be that of the goddess Hestia or Vesta, worshipped by the Greeks as well as Romans as goddess of the home-fire. Whenever any Greeks immigrated to distant lands as Colonists, they were most anxious to bring with them some portion of fire sacred to Hestia. The colony was formed with the altar of the goddess as the central point. The portion of the sacred fire upon the altar connected the colony with the old home-country intensely, the colony taking part in the public affairs of the motherland. The figure in the Brooklyn seal differs from the goddess Vesta in one respect; she is holding in one arm a bundle of rods, tied around the helve of an axe. These rods were known as "fasces," and were carried by the lictors before the Roman magistrates as symbols of power over life and limb. It was the custom of the Romans to scourge a

criminal before striking off his head. The number of lictors, carrying the fasces before the men in authority, altered with the times, fasces were carried before the kings and later the consuls. There was, however, one office which shared in this honor; these were the virgins, who had dedicated their lives to the service of Vesta. One lictor was carrying the fasces before the priestesses of Vesta, called the Vestal Virgins. If on one of their festal processions they met a criminal, who was on his way to pay the penalty for his crime, they had the prerogative of ordering him to be set free. Thus it will be seen that Vesta was the only goddess of the Romans who was in any way connected with the fasces and the axe, "the symbol of sovereign power." The ancient Greeks considered the state to be one large family; this seems to have been also the fundamental thought of the West India Company in creating this seal. The figure of Hestia made it plain to the world that the Bruijkleen Colonie was to be a large collection of homestead farms, owned by the tillers of the soil, not by distant landowners. The fasces were added to set forth the last part more vividly. The motto in the seal, "Eendragt maakt maght," is generally translated as "Unity makes Strength." It is a free translation of the Latin motto in the seal of the seven United Provinces of the Netherlands: "Concordia res parvae crescunt," literally meaning "By unity little things increase." The motto is found in its Dutch form as early as 1556 in the coat of arms of William the Silent, Prince of Orange, the first Stadholder. The use of the motto in the seal of the colony shows that the founding of the Bruijkleen Colonie was looked upon by the government as the beginning of a new era in the colonization of New Netherland.

BRUIJKLEEN—BREUKELLEN—BROOKLAND.

The name Bruijkleen, as we have seen, was applied to the colony, started under the new regulations of 1638. We find the name sometimes applied to the ferry, which was part and parcel of the colony. The name Breukelen was applied to the village on the site of the former Indian village Maerckkaakwick, which was a place of concentration within the Bruijkleen Colonie, and was



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known by that distinct name. The name Breukelen was adopted probably for three reasons. 1. It was similar to the name to the colony. 2. It perpetuated an old familiar name of the fatherland in the new colony. 3. The topography of the two places in the old and the new country were much alike. The name came into use when the village was founded in 1645; after an order had been issued by the College of XIX to the colonists, to establish themselves on some of the most suitable places in towns, hamlets and villages, as the English are in the habit of doing. Director-General Kieft issued his orders in 1644 and 1645 accordingly. When the English came into possession of New Netherland, they applied the name Brookland to Bruijkleen Ferry as well as to Breukelen village, perhaps not being aware of the difference in the meaning of the names. Brookland was a close English counterpart of Bruijkleen as the latter was pronounced by the Dutch, *i. e.*, Brooklane. No doubt the English believed the Dutch name had some connection with the Broken Land. The last name appears on the early Dutch maps of Long Island, and is generally found inscribed in the western part of the island, this part being the one in which the Dutch were interested.

It has been briefly stated in the beginning of this article that the Bruijkleen Colonie played an important part in the history of New Netherland at most critical moments. The present Borough of Brooklyn embraces all of the County of Kings, having annexed all the former towns and the City of Williamsburgh. The future is not less promising. Brooklyn will never annex Manhattan Island, it is true; but it will annex a great part of the population of Manhattan Island, and while Manhattan Borough will become a centre of office buildings and other great commercial structures, Brooklyn will be a borough of homes as well as a place for commercial buildings.

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